United Nations A/62/474

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 October 2007

Original: English

Sixty-second session
Agenda item 128
Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009

Revised estimates relating to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 under sections 17, 20, 21, 27, 28C, 28D, 28E, 28F and 28G to ensure operational preparedness and business continuity in a protracted human influenza pandemic crisis

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered an advance version of the report of the Secretary-General on revised estimates relating to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 under sections 17, 20, 21, 27, 28C, 28D, 28E, 28F and 28G to ensure operational preparedness and business continuity in a protracted human influenza pandemic crisis (A/62/328). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. The Advisory Committee notes that, in order to respond to the emergence of the virulent strain of avian influenza known as A(H5N1), which has put the world on alert for a new human influenza pandemic, the United Nations system has developed coordinated strategies at the international and national levels. A United Nations System Influenza Coordinator appointed on 25 September 2005, was given the task of developing and implementing a comprehensive, unified strategy for the United Nations system globally on influenza pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, and of improving efforts to control avian influenza.[1] The inter-agency steering committee on avian and human influenza, established in September 2005 and chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, meets approximately every other month to provide guidance for a coordinated system response globally.[2] In March

[1] A/62/328, para. 1.
[2] Ibid., para. 2.

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2006, policies were set out aimed at ensuring preparedness, sustaining operations and protecting personnel. These included (a) a directive by the Secretary-General, requesting all the United Nations offices and agencies to appoint an avian and human influenza coordinator at all duty stations; (b) Pandemic Planning and Preparedness Guidelines for the United Nations System; and (c) United Nations Medical Services Staff Contingency Plan Guidelines for an Influenza Pandemic.[3] Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the influenza pandemic preparedness coordinator at Headquarters was appointed in May 2006 and served in that capacity until July 2007, when the functions were taken over by the Department of Management (see para. 6 below).

3. The Advisory Committee also notes that in September 2006, the Pandemic Senior Emergency Policy Team, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, requested all the United Nations headquarters locations and regional commissions to prepare contingency plans with budgetary requirements. This contingency planning had two goals: to protect the health, safety and security of United Nations personnel and physical assets, and to ensure the continuation of critical functions and operations of the United Nations. In order to ensure that those contingency plans and budgetary requirements were in line with global best practices for pandemic planning, an external validation exercise was undertaken in June and July 2007.[4] Contingency planning for peacekeeping missions and offices of the United Nations system at the country level has also been undertaken.[5]

4. The Advisory Committee further notes that 2007 requirements for non-post requirements for the initial preparedness activities of the United Nations Secretariat are being met through funding arrangements under the discretionary authority granted to the Secretary-General in General Assembly resolution 60/283, and will be reported in the context of the second performance report on the programme budget.[6] Those requirements, which total $5,969,900 for 2007, are under sections 17, 18, 20, 21, 27, 28A, 28C, 28D, 28E, 28F and 28G of the programme budget for 2006-2007. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that of that amount, there is expected to be an unspent balance of $275,577 at the end of the year (see annex I).

5. As indicated in tables 9 and 10 of the report of the Secretary-General, the revised estimates for 2008-2009 include additional requirements of $7,868,600 for the offices in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and for the regional commissions, of which $5,951,600 is required for Headquarters.[7] Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with a summary of the itemized recurrent and non-recurrent requirements (see annex II). Three categories of preparedness activities have been identified: (a) activities needed to maintain business continuity of the United Nations critical functions and operations; (b) medical intervention and prevention; and (c) preparatory activities in capacity-building and training. In the event of a pandemic, more activities would have to be undertaken and additional resources would be required. Therefore, the additional requirements, estimated at $9,976,200, are presented for information in the report of the Secretary-General.[8]

[3] Ibid., para. 3.
[4] Ibid., paras. 6 and 8.
[5] Ibid., para. 7.
[6] Ibid., para. 13.
[7] Ibid., table 1.
[8] Ibid., paras. 11 and 12 and tables 9 and 10.

II. Business continuity

6. The Advisory Committee notes that activities to maintain business continuity would account for the largest share of the budgetary requirements for 2008-2009. Out of the total estimate of $5,951,600 for Headquarters, $5,038,700 relates to activities to maintain business continuity, including resources for the Business Continuity Management Unit, which has been created in the Office of Central Support Services of the Department of Management. The Unit has been given responsibility for the coordination and monitoring of crisis planning and preparedness activities at all locations.[9] Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the Unit, and its related information technology support staff, would consist of six positions (2 P-5, 1 P-4, 2 P-3 and 1 General Service (Other level)), to be funded under general temporary assistance, at an estimated cost of $1,963,500 for 2008-2009. Except for one P-5, these positions are expected to continue beyond 2009 (see annex III). Two of the positions had already been filled and three were expected to be filled in November 2007.

7. Business continuity activities proposed for 2008-2009 would focus on upgrading information technology services in United Nations offices. At Headquarters, the procurement of software and licences is planned to enable videoconference meetings for the Security Council and the General Assembly in the event of an emergency, and to enable critical personnel either to telecommute or to continue working within the United Nations complex.[10] For the United Nations Office at Vienna, both hardware and software platforms would be upgraded in order to enable all 500 personnel to work remotely.[11] The activities at the United Nations Office at Geneva would include upgrading information and communications technology and building maintenance systems to enable telecommuting, and providing additional audio and videoconferencing support to enable the Security Council and the General Assembly to continue functioning.[12]

8. The Advisory Committee notes that there have been a number of other business continuity activities undertaken by the Secretariat. **The Committee does not favour a piecemeal approach to business continuity requirements. It therefore recommends that a comprehensive review of business continuity requirements be undertaken, under the auspices of the Chief Information Technology Officer. Such a review should cover all business continuity activities, including those outlined above related to the human influenza pandemic, as well as those related to disaster recovery and business continuity in the area of information and communications technology, for which a separate report is being submitted to the General Assembly, pursuant to resolutions A/59/276 and A/60/266. A supplementary report thereon should be submitted to the General Assembly at a later stage. Pending the results of the review, the Committee recommends that general temporary assistance positions be used strictly as and when required. The Committee therefore recommends a reduction of 20 per cent ($629,000) in the amount requested under general temporary assistance for 2008-2009.**

[9] Ibid., paras. 19 and 20.
[10] Ibid., paras. 15 and 20.
[11] Ibid., para. 27.
[12] Ibid., para. 25.

III. Medical intervention and prevention

9. The Advisory Committee considered the issue of procurement and replenishment of medications for prevention or treatment in the event of a human influenza pandemic. As indicated in paragraph 21 of the report of the Secretary-General, maintaining medical stocks would require continuing investments to replenish supplies after their expiry dates. The Committee was informed that the medications would include common flu medication, antibiotics and seasonal influenza vaccine. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the effectiveness of existing medications in the event of a pandemic was unknown, since the virus could mutate from the current strain. In addition, it was informed that the development of a vaccine would take months after emergence of the virus.

10. Further, the Advisory Committee was informed that, while antibiotics had an average shelf life of four years, seasonal influenza vaccine and oral suspension for paediatric use would need to be replenished annually. **The Committee questions the cost-effectiveness of the proposed stockpiling, and annual replenishment in some cases, of medications to respond to a virus for which they may not be effective.** The Committee points out that the World Health Organization (WHO) has had arrangements for an emergency supply of certain medications with major pharmaceutical companies, and the Committee was also informed that the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Programme had similar arrangements with pharmaceutical companies. **The Committee therefore recommends that the Secretariat explore the possibility of making similar arrangements for medications and vaccines in the event of a human influenza pandemic. At this stage, the Committee recommends a reduction of 20 per cent ($89,000) for medications that have a limited shelf life.**

11. With regard to cooperation with host countries on medical intervention and prevention, the Advisory Committee notes with appreciation that the Government of Austria would provide medical intervention and prevention for United Nations personnel in Vienna and that the Government of Switzerland would make similar provisions for United Nations personnel in Geneva.[13] **The Advisory Committee recommends that all offices of the United Nations be urged to work closely with host Governments and to seek similar provisions for United Nations personnel.**

IV. Capacity-building and training

12. With regard to preparatory activities in capacity-building and training, the Advisory Committee notes that these would cover the external training of focal points and internal training of staff, by consultants and through information sessions. The awareness campaign would involve, among other things, the issuance of leaflets on coping with pandemic stress, brochures with advice and answers to frequently asked questions, booklets and posters.[14] **In the opinion of the Committee, WHO should lead in this type of training. Priority should be given to e-training and e-learning, while taking full advantage of the information available on the WHO website and training materials prepared by WHO. The**

[13] Ibid., paras. 24 and 26.

[14] Ibid., paras. 22, 31, 35, 41 and 44.

Committee welcomes the availability in all six official languages of the information on the WHO website.

13. In this connection, the Advisory Committee notes that two websites are to be hosted by the Secretariat. One of them, for the public, in all six official languages, will be maintained by the Department of Public Information, while the other, for United Nations personnel, presumably in both working languages of the Secretariat, would be maintained by the Office of Human Resources Management.[15] The Advisory Committee was informed that the hosting, content management and updating of the public website would require $128,000 for 2008-2009 and that the content management of and infrastructure support for the internal website would cost $404,400 for the same period. **In view of the above, and given the key role of WHO as the focal point for activities relating to the influenza pandemic, the Committee is concerned about the overlap and duplication. In its view, the Secretariat should ensure that maximum use is made of the material produced by WHO, and limit its own activities accordingly. Therefore, the Committee recommends a reduction of 20 per cent ($106,480) under both contractual services and general operating expenses.**

V. Conclusions

14. **The Advisory Committee recognizes the need for preparedness and contingency planning for a protracted human influenza pandemic crisis, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General. However, the Committee is of the opinion that a prudent and well-coordinated approach ought to be followed across the United Nations system. The United Nations System Influenza Coordinator should ensure coordination, while WHO should function as the central gateway for the public awareness campaign and provide training and technical support for the United Nations system as a whole. The Advisory Committee recommends that the revised estimates for 2008-2009 be approved subject to the recommendations made above. The Committee also recommends that continuation, beyond 2008-2009, of the Business Continuity Management Unit be considered in the light of further consultation with WHO (see para. 6 above).**

[15] Ibid., para. 22.

Annex I

Expenditure against allotments for avian influenza preparedness

(United States dollars)

Object of expenditure	*Allotted for 2007* a	*Expenditures as at 24 September 2007* b	*Estimated expenditures from 25 September to 31 December 2007* c	*Balance* d=a-(b+c)
Posts	—	—	—	—
Other staff costs	1 185 500.0	369 717.0	539 895.7	258 987.3
Consultants and experts	—	16 900.0	—	—
Travel of representatives	—	—	—	—
Travel of staff	112 100.0	55 016.0	58 758.2	(1 674.2)
Contractual services	924 100.0	1 502.8	922 597.2	—
General operating expenses	859 100.0	—	841 550.0	17 550.0
Hospitality	—	—	—	—
Supplies and materials	1 719 900.0	12.0	1 719 900.0	(12.0)
Furniture and equipment	1 169 200.0	56 870.2	1 111 603.8	726.0
Grants and contributions	—	—	—	—
Total	**5 969 900.0**	**500 018.0**	**5 194 304.8**	**275 577.2**

Note: Allotments for 2007 were issued in August 2007. While only a small percentage of the total allotments has been spent so far, most of the remaining resources are expected to be committed by the end of 2007.

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Annex II

Summary of requirements by object of expenditure, 2008-2009

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	Total	*Recurrent*	*Non-recurrent*
Posts	—	—	—
Other staff costs	3 148.6	2 709.1	439.5
Consultants and experts	3.0	3.0	—
Travel of staff	40.0	40.0	—
Contractual services	1 960.3	456.6	1 503.7
General operating expenses	1 888.6	1 888.6	—
Hospitality	—	—	—
Supplies and materials	693.3	406.6	286.7
Furniture and equipment	134.8	108.4	26.4
Grants and contributions	—	—	—
Total	**7 868.6**	**5 612.3**	**2 256.3**

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Annex III

General temporary assistance positions

Office	*Positions expected to continue beyond 2009*	*Positions not expected to continue beyond 2009*
Economic Commission for Africa	3 positions (1 P-3 avian influenza focal point and 2 GS (LL) for preparatory and training activities)	None
Office of Human Resources Management	None	2 P-4 positions for preparing medical guidelines and simulations and coordination/preparation/ implementation of training plan
Office of Central Support Services	5 positions (1 P-5 Chief of Business Continuity Management Unit, 1 P-4 specialist in business continuity preparedness, 2 P-3 information technology officers and 1 GS (OL) assistant)	1 P-5 Coordinator for simulations and operations continuity
United Nations Office at Nairobi	3 positions (1 P-4 coordination specialist and 2 GS (LL) assistants)	None